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ABSTRACT

This report presents research findings on the opinions of 58 low-income black men and women who discuss whether or not they feel they could earn their way out of poverty and how they might do so. The research involved four focus groups of employed and unemployed men and women from the Washington, D.C., area. The following general conclusions are drawn from an analysis of the focus group discussions: (1) participants see their poverty as caused by a mixture of poor choices, bad luck, and racial discrimination; (2) most believe they can earn their way out of poverty and expect to do so eventually; (3) participants remain hopeful and motivated about successful employment even though they have many reasons to despair; and (4) most believe strongly that they can attain the "American Dream" if they work hard. The individual and marketplace barriers that make obtaining and keeping a job difficult for low-income blacks are discussed. Ways that businesses can help train low-income blacks for jobs are explored. Policy implications are presented based on the participants' responses. Three appendices contain representative quotes from the groups, an overview of the participants, and the outline used to direct the discussions. (JS)

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GETTING AHEAD:

What Poor People Think About Their Chances of Earning Their Way Out of Poverty

By J.M. Foster
Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.
1988

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Greater Washington Research Center

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PREFACE

Do poor people believe they can earn their way out of poverty? This report presents the opinions of 58 low-income men and women who discuss whether or not they feel they could earn their way out of poverty and how they might do so. The analysis was prepared for the information of people trying to reduce the numbers of Washington, D.C., residents in long-term poverty by increasing their earnings from employment.

Based on four focus group discussions of employed and unemployed poor adults organized by Peter Hart Research, the author concludes that most of those who participated not only believe they can earn their way out of poverty but also expect they will eventually do so. They dream the American Dream of the good life and they believe if they work hard a good job will get them there. At the same time the life circumstances they report indicate that significant personal and marketplace barriers stand between them and their chances of realizing their dream.

Their comments range from looking for work to caring for children, from feelings about welfare to feelings about drugs, from mistakes of the past to visions of the future. Reports of economic, sexual, and racial tensions mingle with descriptions of pleasures gained from family, religion, and, sometimes, support from a boss or a counselor. The theme of work as a means to a life of dignity and comfort recurs throughout.

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SUMMARY

In July, 1988, Hart Research conducted four focus groups for the Greater Washington Research Center to examine attitudes among low-income black Washingtonians regarding their potential to earn their way out of poverty. The discussion sessions explored in depth the participants' views of themselves, their future, and their opportunities to achieve the so-called "American Dream." Each focus group lasted two hours and had 12-17 participants who were black and low income. The four groups were selected, respectively, to represent unemployed women, employed women, unemployed men, and employed men.

The focus group discussions were designed to help answer questions about whether an earnings-based strategy would offer low-income black Washingtonians a feasible means of escaping poverty. Specifically, the purpose was to gain insight into how low-income persons view their chances of working their way out of poverty and what they think would be the best way to help them do so.

Despite the wide variety of experiences and perspectives among focus group participants, we may draw some general conclusions. Low-income black Washingtonians are likely to see their poverty as caused by a mixture of poor choices, bad luck, and racial discrimination. Nonetheless, most believe they can earn their way out of poverty and expect to do so eventually. They remain hopeful and motivated about successful employment even though they have many reasons to despair and they face daily temptations to make money in faster, seemingly easier ways on the street (selling drugs, for example, or -- for women -- becoming dependent on welfare). Most participants believe strongly that they can attain the American Dream if they work hard, and they also know that a good job is the route there.

The life circumstances of these participants suggest there are significant personal and marketplace barriers that will make obtaining and keeping a good job difficult for them, however. Not all the obstacles are clearly perceived by the participants themselves, but are evident in the discussions. The most important are lack of education and lack of experience, followed by child and family responsibilities. Substance abuse, physical and emotional disabilities, and criminal records are other

substantial obstacles in many of these individuals' lives. The primary marketplace barriers to job entry are a lack of low-skilled jobs paying wages adequate to support a family, a lack of jobs matching their experience, and racial discrimination. In addition, reflecting the fact that the kind and level of jobs poor people typically hold are insecure, participants seem particularly subject to layoffs and other job dislocations.

Finally, perhaps in part because they do not have a clear perception of the impediments, the participants have few concrete ideas about how to help themselves and others like them get jobs. They do offer some suggestions for improving employment and training programs, based on their experience. Programs which provide a motivating structure and which teach job preparation skills are seen as more helpful than those that provide training for specific skills. Further, participants say unanimously that only skills-training programs which place a person in an actual position -- i.e., on-the-job training programs -- are truly successful. This belief is also the basis of their advice for employers: take a chance with low-skilled workers by providing more on-the-job training. Participants are very willing to pay their dues with low wages while they learn and prove themselves, as long as better wages and opportunities for advancement follow.

Some conclusions about participants' needs may be inferred from the discussions. Recurring themes suggest basic points the Washington community must bear in mind when designing any program to help people out of poverty. First, low-income black Washingtonians are clearly motivated and receptive to being helped; hence, efforts to increase poor people's earnings from employment appear worth pursuing. Second, because poor people experience many difficulties in trying to enter and remain in the job market, one thing they need is practical assistance with these difficulties. Third, education and job experience are key to getting these people on the job wagon. Ways to encourage employers to hire workers with limited experience should be explored. Finally, any program to increase employment among poor people must not overlook the temptation represented by the underground economy and welfare: it must find ways to set countervailing standards and reinforce these value mechanisms within society and the family.

The following report presents the analysis of the discussions and the key findings. The Appendices contain representative verbatim remarks of the panelists in the four sessions, an overview of the participants, and the outline used to direct the discussions.

ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS

Introduction and purpose of the study

On July 25 and 26, 1988, Hart Research conducted four focus groups for the Greater Washington Research Center. The goal of these focus groups was to examine attitudes among low-income black Washingtonians regarding their potential to earn their way out of poverty. Led by Judy Fisher, the discussion sessions explored in depth the participants' views of themselves, their future, and their opportunities to achieve the so-called "American Dream."

Each focus group lasted two hours and had 12 to 17 participants. The main criteria for selection of applicants were income, race, sex, and employment status. Every participant was black and low income; nearly all were poor (defined as having income at or below the federal poverty level). Beyond this, the four groups were selected, respectively, to represent unemployed women, employed women, unemployed men, and employed men.

The focus group discussions were designed to help answer questions about whether an earnings-based strategy would offer low-income black Washingtonians a feasible means of escaping poverty. Specifically, the purpose was to gain insight into how low-income persons view their chances of working their way out of poverty and what they think would be the best way to help them do so. A secondary purpose was to explore whether differences between low-income men and women could be instructive in developing assistance strategies.

This report presents the analysis of the discussions and the key findings. The Appendices contain representative verbatim remarks of the panelists in the four sessions, an overview of the participants, and the outline used to direct the discussions.

The analysis in the main body of the report focuses on three questions. First, based on their current situation, does it appear that the participants are capable of performing work that would allow them to earn their way out of poverty? Second, are they hopeful and motivated to do so? Finally, what do they consider would be most helpful to them as they try to achieve such a goal?

Are the poor capable of earning their way out of poverty?

While participants still believe in the American Dream, their descriptions of their way of life point up a large discrepancy between their hopes and their current situation. The majority of participants share rented one- or two-bedroom apartments with family members of different generations. In most cases, the number of residents is greater than the number of bedrooms. Few participants live in a nuclear family. Women tend to be single parents, and men tend to live with parents or grandparents. For most participants, there is only one breadwinner in the household.

Families -- apparently more so than spouses -- are an important source of financial and emotional support. Indeed, both men and women express mixed feelings about marriage and children. While most of the participants are single, most also have children. Many mention the pleasure they find in playing with their children and teaching them, but they are also likely to regret having had children and to blame children or the relationships that produced them for their current financial circumstances. As one particularly bitter woman remarks, "I wouldn't have had any children; I would have gone to college. I came to Washington, met somebody, and my stomach started growing. If I'd stayed in New York, I would have finished my career as an artist. Now I'm on public assistance. I haven't made any good decisions. Every decision I've made is a flop -- even down to my kids." The same story is true for men: "My downfall came from one of these D.C. women. I got messed over, I blew my military career, coming home to chase after this woman. And my daughter -- well, I thought she was mine at the time -- well, I been through a lot." A 32-year-old married man reflects the ambivalence when he says, "My best decision so far was getting married. Sometimes it's beautiful, sometimes it's not."

Underlying many of the remarks is a hostility toward the opposite sex and toward children as entrapments. Consequently, neither sex appears to view the other as a support. We see this pattern even in participants' leisure activities. The men play a lot of sports with their male friends and the women like to go out with their female friends.

Participants' lives are dominated by the question of employment. For the unemployed, a portion of the day is usually devoted to looking for work. Quite frequently, the low point in their daily routine is getting up in the morning, knowing they do not have a job. Unlike the stereotype, few

unemployed persons say they sleep late or watch much television. They rise early, take care of children, and look for work. Among participants who have jobs, however, the high point of the day is usually getting off work from jobs that are boring and tedious. Work histories among all participants are a repeated pattern of on-again/off-again employment in low-wage jobs such as cleaning, security, cashiering, and food service.

Their lives are rife with barriers to employment. The most important one for all participants is lack of education. On average, less than half have completed high school. In a discussion about poor decisions they have made, curtailing their education tops the list of mistakes. A 38-year-old supermarket worker says, "I think I shoulda been into school a little more, and been into ball a little more, but I was kinda into the streets, too. My attitude wasn't right. If I had it to do over, I'd been a lot more into school and sports, 'cause now I see how sports is getting a lot of 'em over." A 32-year-old unemployed woman responds, "I would have stayed in school and listened to my elders a little bit more. My good decision was to go back to get my GED and to stop drugging."

Another major barrier, looming largest for women but also affecting men, is responsibility for children or other dependents. About half the women in one group say they left jobs because of pregnancy or child care problems, and several men were unable to take jobs because of responsibility for children. Other family responsibilities, such as taking care of a disabled husband or adult children, have also hampered some women's efforts to be employed.

For men, a particularly tough barrier is having a criminal record. Most of these are the consequence of drug charges. Once a man has a record, obtaining a job is very difficult. One unemployed 50-year-old's story seems typical: "Jobs used to be like automatic for me; I had my choice. But I went to jail for the first time when I was 37 -- first time I got a girl with drugs -- and I got there and America forgot about all the time I was okay. . . . My record's not that bad -- never hurt no one -- just drugs."

Drug or other substance abuse itself is certainly a factor that affects or has affected many participants' (especially men's) ability to work. Several mention attending NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings. Overcoming a substance abuse problem can be substantially motivating to individuals, however. "I had a little battle with drugs, but I whipped it

without a judge telling me I had to, so I think things are going to get better for me," says an unemployed 41-year-old man.

Personal poor health or disabilities also inhibit the ability to work. Both men and women mention periods of disability or health problems that currently or at one time prevented them from working. These problems are not always physical. The stresses of participants' lives take their toll. One woman explains her reasons for quitting work as stress and depression strong enough that she had to resign and go under a doctor's care. Another man explains the reason his family was dependent on welfare when he was a child: "My ma had a couple of nervous breakdowns, she couldn't work, so welfare helped us out."

In addition to personal barriers, participants face many externally imposed obstacles in the marketplace. They find it hard to get jobs in D.C. The primary reason for this is probably their lack of experience or, said another way, the mismatch between the available jobs and their skills and experience. The story of a 24-year-old unemployed father is typical: "All the jobs I been trying to get they tell me I don't have enough experience, or I need to be certified, which takes two years of OJT. I went down to government buildings, took the civil service test, checking around government every day, trying to get back into my field. . . The worst part of the day is checking with all these government agencies. I prefer to work for the government -- it's more secure than private industry -- but I spend about an hour and a half a day checking with them." About his partner, who is also unemployed, he says: "She's been on 60 interviews, and they all tell her the same thing: she needs experience. " A 38-year-old unemployed woman sums up the problem: "Experience, do you have experience? I get so tired of that. How do I get the experience if I don't get the job?"

When asked what advice they would give a country cousin who comes here looking for work, participants' most frequent response is to tell the cousin to get experience or training. Since D.C. is not an industrial area, but a highly professional one, unskilled workers naturally have difficulty finding employment. Participants do think more jobs are available to them in the suburbs, but for the most part feel that transportation problems and costs make such opportunities unfeasible for them.

Moreover, jobs paying enough to support a family are not readily available for unskilled workers like themselves. When asked the minimum

acceptable wage, most people's replies fall in the $6.00-to-$9.00/hour range. (As a group, only employed women offer a lower figure: $5.00/hour.) Few people would debate that such a wage is necessary to pay rent and provide for dependents. However, few of the participants in these groups have education or experience levels qualifying them to earn such wages. Their common occupations, if female, are cleaning, cashiering, and typing; men typically are maintenance workers, security guards, construction workers, or mail clerks.

One of the most visible barriers faced by low-income blacks in the marketplace is racial discrimination. Participants differ on the extent to which they feel discrimination operates, but all essentially agree that blacks do not have the same job opportunities as whites, that whites are more likely to have a better education, get the job, and get raises afterward than are blacks. Some group members relate personal experiences that also include instances of discrimination against blacks by other blacks. Participants are hopeful about change -- "A lot of blacks is up there now weren't a few years ago. It's gonna change" -- but they are also realistic about the present situation. The characteristic attitude is that expressed by a man employed as a maintenance worker: "This is a white man's world, for real. The blacks are trying to get more into it. They can handle the job. But if it's between me and the Caucasian, who they going to pick? It's a Caucasian running the place. You still might get it, but it's going to be harder."

Discrimination is definitely a more salient issue for men than women. Several men perceive an institutional structure that keeps black men out of the labor force. As one bitter participant notes, "Seems like society takes for granted the black male is unemployed. So they give the black woman some money. They always got Lorton and the D.C. Jail for us."

These many kinds of obstacles -- both in participants' personal lives and in the marketplace -- not only make getting jobs hard for participants, but also make keeping jobs difficult for them. When participants describe why they left jobs, they seldom say it was because of another job offering more money or better opportunity. Their reasons fall into the same kinds of categories as those which make getting jobs hard: child and family responsibilities, other personal circumstances, psychological conflicts, and marketplace factors.

Child or family responsibilities are a primary reason women leave jobs. "I stopped because of pregnancy." "Family problems at home made me stop working." "I got fired because of child care problems." However, child care responsibilities are also mentioned more than one might expect by men. Several are single parents with primary responsibility for child care. One man quit a job to begin taking care of his daughter after the mother's loss of a well-paying job meant she could no longer afford to send their child to a private preschool.

Personal circumstances which lead participants to leave jobs are varied. Substance abuse, both alcohol and narcotics, makes keeping jobs difficult for a few participants. Disability resulting from an accident or poor health is a relatively common reason for leaving jobs. Occasionally, poor choices in regard to personal relationships are responsible, as in the case of the man who said, "I blew my military career, coming home to chase after this woman."

Participants also departed jobs because of psychological conflicts. "The job I had at first was a homemaker, working with old people and handicapped, I loved it, but it was too painful when you went to somebody's house and they passed away, so I couldn't deal with it," says one woman. Another confided she lost the best job she ever had because of a personality conflict with a fellow worker: "I got a job . . . as a painter, making $9 an hour, but the only reason I'm not still there is because a painter threw a big bucket of paint at me and I pushed him back." Another man speaks nostalgically about his job pattern before he got a criminal record: "I could get any job and keep it. When I got tired of it, I just gave it up. Once I got a record, things changed, jobs wasn't easy to get." This man, however, is an exception: tiring of a job was not commonly volunteered as a reason for leaving employment.

Finally, marketplace problems beleaguer participants. The kind and level of jobs they hold are insecure, and participants leave jobs for a variety of reasons which are beyond their control. "Under new management, I lost my job." "My company moved." "It was only a temporary job." "I was a clerk in the [federal agency], and I got RIFed [let go due to a Reduction in Force]." A woman who works as a domestic says, "I left my last job because my employer died; I left some because they refused to pay my Social Security."

Sometimes participants choose to leave jobs because they perceive market inequities such as race discrimination or unfair or inadequate wages and have no other ideas about how to respond. "I was working as a brake mechanic, and they weren't giving me a satisfactory commission." "I couldn't earn enough at my part-time job to feed my two boys, so I had to go back to welfare." "I was at a job for eight months, and all the white folks got a raise except me. I asked about it, and they said accept what I'm giving you now or quit, so I quit."

In short, bad things seem to happen disproportionately to poor people. And, unfortunately, poor people frequently lack the resources to adequately respond to and resolve problems when they do occur. Poor people don't enjoy the network of financial, social, and psychological advantages which protects people with higher incomes and better educations from being devastated by adversity.

Moreover, the discouraging effect of all these barriers which make it so hard for participants to get and to keep jobs is exacerbated by the temptation to make easy money on the street. A theme repeated more often among men, but still felt among women, is the lure of making money in faster, easier ways than working. And once given in to, crime often creates its own cycle of poverty, as described by one 40-year-old unemployed man: "Once I got a record, things changed; jobs wasn't easy to get. . . . If I don't have a job interview, things get pretty hectic 'cause I don't have anything to do. My mind starts to wander 'cause I think about making money. I might pickpocket somebody, go around the corner and steal something."

Participants are surrounded by examples of others who live by hustling drugs, engaging in prostitution, and stealing. While a few group members admit to committing theft or to convictions for dealing drugs, none claims to earn money regularly now in that manner, and all are vocal about the danger and stupidity of such behavior. The view of a 31-year-old construction worker is representative: "Some people try to better themself, and some don't. They just want the quick, fast money. Even been to school with degrees, they figure they get more money hustling. I tell 'em, I've been there and it didn't pay." Still, there is a strong sense in all of the sessions that, for other low-income persons, this avenue of illicit income is a dominant factor in keeping them from working hard to earn their way out of poverty.

Equally cogent is the concern for what this temptation represents to children. "You got 12- and 13-year-olds walking around with more money than I got in my pocket," observes a 26-year-old janitor. Participants are well aware that the easy money and exciting life of the streets can exert a powerful influence on a child--one that leads to an incomplete education and an early criminal record and, eventually, becomes the road to poverty. People feel that parents who offer a positive role model and love, encouragement, and church-inspired values can help save a child. Yet they do not often see such parenting in communities where children are frequently left to fend for themselves. Moreover, even good parenting may be ineffective in contrast to the outside temptations. "The kid's got to want to, because the street's got it over the parents," declares a man who works as a janitor.

For women, welfare offers a way to get money more quickly and easily than by working. Participants have mixed views about welfare. They all appreciate the need for it in unfortunate circumstances, such as when a breadwinner passes away. They all reject immediately, however, such ideas as "Once you're on welfare you can't get off," "It's hard to get a job paying more than welfare," "People who are working should be proud and people on welfare should be ashamed," and "Welfare kids will grow up to be welfare parents." They debate the notion that "It's dumb to work when you can get welfare," but only because they feel that in the case of a woman who has many children and no education or job skills, she would never be able to earn as much as she gets on welfare.

Participants clearly perceive the system as open to abuse and agree that, in fact, it is being abused. This they resent. "You got people getting welfare, living better than we are, and we're working every day. I got an aunt on public assistance. She always had a house, a new car, just sitting at home, getting a check," one employed man complains.

Welfare provokes polarized responses among men and women. Women tend to believe that living on welfare is unpleasant and demeaning, and that welfare does not provide enough money to live on. Those who have been on it and got off were overjoyed when they managed to do so. However, women are also aware that there are "other" women who just lie around and make no attempt to get off the system. A 21-year-old mother says, "When I get paid on Mondays and Tuesdays, I feel good because I did this myself. When my

daughter was born, I gave myself a certain amount of time to get off this. It takes something out of you; it makes you feel low. It's true, if your child is old enough to go to school, why you sitting at home? If you can't read and write, you can learn."

Men note the real need for welfare, but then go on to express a great deal of resentment at the system for various reasons. They are jealous that they are not eligible to receive benefits. "When I hear 'welfare,' I grow jealous, really. I tried to get on food stamps, but if you don't have custody of the kids, you can't get nothing. They ought to do some hing for a single man till he gets back on his feet, so he doesn't have to g to the streets." Men also resent having to work hard to get what some women get for not working at all. "You got people getting welfare, living better than we are, and we're working every day," said one bitter man.

Their responses also suggest that some men feel negatively toward women for bearing children without fathers in order to get the support available through welfare. "These women live in apartments free, everything free, and they don't care their kids are running around with no dads," said one father. Indeed, men are in general more critical of the single-parent family structure than women are. When asked about how to help children in low-income neighborhoods avoid poverty, men are likely to cite the necessity for two-parent families and for better parenting, whereas women are not likely to mention this at all.

Because life on welfare appears an easy one to men, they are more likely to see it as contributing to a cycle of poverty and dependence. That is, they are more likely to feel that, once on welfare, a person will have a hard time getting motivated to give it up. To them, it is a simple matter of economics: once a person has been receiving unearned money, he or she is loath to relinquish it. Even if receiving welfare does not destroy motivation, it can become another "hustle," something people cheat to receive, even when they have income from other sources. In this sense, welfare is another form of temptation for faster, easier financial support than can be gained by working.

Men are more likely than women to offer suggestions for improving the system to help people fight their reliance on welfare. "Welfare's okay, but not welfare maintenance. They should give you a definite program to come off it. It's like methadone." "People on welfare for years need some

training for a job." "Social workers should interview you personally, see if you can get into a training program. It's not true you can't get off, but it depends on your type of sickness."

Are participants hopeful and motivated to try?

For the most part, participants are very hopeful and motivated. There are a few exceptions, a few individuals who feel every choice they have made has led to failure and who do not see a bright future for themselves. But the majority are positive, and their responses are remarkably similar when it comes to what they want and expect from life. Their dreams, as well as their expectations, are little different from those of the average, middle-class white American. When asked where they see themselves in ten years (or where they would like to see themselves), participants respond almost unanimously that they would like to have a good job, a house, a car, and a family.

In plain and simple language, most of the men and women, young or old, employed or unemployed, express these hopes. One 50-year-old woman says, "First step, I hope I'll be working. I'll save up some money, buy me a small home; I'd love a yard." A younger woman plans for herself and her daughter: "I'd like to have my own business, own home, own car, and own property that didn't have taxes every time you turn around. And pray that my daughter finishes school and go ahead to college and be the lawyer that she plans to be." An older man states succinctly, "I'd like to have me a nice home, kids in college, no pressure from bills."

Moreover, participants have not lost the capacity to dream. All agree that "The Cosby Show" represents the American Dream -- that, while it is not realistic in terms of how people behave, attaining the lifestyle it portrays is not outside the realm of possibility, even for undereducated persons like themselves. A 24-year-old maintenance worker who dropped out of school in the 10th grade expresses a common sentiment when he says, "It don't have to be no dream. It's a goal that you set. Why dream about it? Set the goal and go for it."

While a few demur, the majority of participants feel that the odds are not overwhelmingly against them if they just make up their mind to pursue their goals. They speak in very concrete terms of how they will be able to afford that house and car in ten years, and many are taking or have taken

steps toward their dreams by enrolling in school or training programs. Most are trying to earn their way out, and they expect that they will do so. "If I work everyday and stay on that job, I know I can get anything I want," says one woman.

Participants adamantly reject the suggestion that the reason they don't have that lifestyle now is because they don't work hard enough, and they criticize people who would say such a thing. "I'd tell them to give me credit for what I'm trying to establish now." "I'd tell them don't knock me, but help me get there." The majority of participants are trying to overcome their circumstances. They are aware that it's going to be hard for them, but they remain hopeful and motivated and continue to dream.

Clearly, however, the line between realistic and unrealistic dreams is a difficult one to draw for people who face such discouraging circumstances as inadequate education, early parenthood, criminal records, substance abuse, racial discrimination, tight job markets, a low minimum wage, and so forth. The younger the person, the more likely he or she is to have big dreams. A boy in high school who currently watches about ten hours of TV a day and is soon to go to college on a basketball scholarship says he plans to become a doctor. Older persons tend to be more realistic, but they still dream, particularly of owning their own business. One woman plans: "If I'm alive (I'm praying every day I don't get shot -- these guys out here shooting), I'd like to have my own shop and be making money. I'm supposed to go and get my license for a hair salon in the fall." An unemployed 24-year-old man says, "I plan to have a couple of businesses of my own, in the mechanic field. Also go back to school, college. I hope to be more in control of my life, self-sufficient, than I am now." This fantasy of being self-employed in some way, of owning a business, may stem from a desire to be more self-reliant, more in control of their lives, because most participants clearly are not.

One of the most encouraging findings from the focus groups, however, is that only a very few of these people see themselves as trapped by circumstances. One middle-aged, unemployed woman criticizes others' belief that they could achieve the lifestyle represented by the Bill Cosby show. "Just working hard isn't the key. . . . I know people who work every day, and they don't live the Cosby lifestyle, and they been working 25 years. Hard work isn't the issue. The system is geared to keep a lot of us down."

But this attitude is firmly rejected by the others, who express strong faith that they can achieve the American dream. "Just because you don't see me go to work in the morning doesn't mean I don't go to work. And just because I get welfare doesn't mean I'm going to get it all my life," affirmed one woman. It is this quality of responsibility for their lives that is particularly noteworthy among participants. They are more likely to attribute their circumstances in life to poor choices or to a combination of poor choices and chance than they are to perceive any institutionalized entrapment in poverty. And they believe strongly that they can overcome their poverty.

A similar attitude shows up in participants' reactions to discussions about the role of racism in keeping them poor. Groups are evenly divided on the issue of race discrimination, with all acknowledging that the problem exists, but disagreeing on the extent to which it plays a part in keeping blacks from being able to work their way out of poverty.

The central issue in the disagreement always comes down to motivation. While all agree that blacks have a harder time in the job market, have fewer opportunities, face discrimination in education, and lack the social networks that help whites get jobs, participants' debate always centers on how to confront all these negatives. Some blacks are inclined to give up, to adopt a defeatist outlook. Others, like one employed woman, take the opposite view: "A lot of black people look at it like the white man gonna do this, and they don't realize that the white man can't keep you down. If you want to go, you can go. It's you keeping you down. They look at themselves with that negativity."

Discussions about how blacks might be keeping themselves down tended to move on to two other points. First, participants say discrimination or lack of racial conscience among blacks who have made it is a problem. "It's not all white. Before you get to see that white man, half the time you looking at a black face, and they look at you like they're better and won't let you through that door. We're holding each other down," one young woman laments. The second observation -- that blacks need to turn to and help each other to overcome racism -- is a corollary of the first.

In the final analysis, every group more or less came to agree that racism is no excuse, that blacks have to take responsibility for how they respond to the situation. People must not allow themselves to be

overwhelmed by negativism, but must keep fighting and applying themselves. "We just have to be motivated. It's always been difficult. It looks like whites have more opportunities, but you have to want to do something in yourself, and stop thinking about how hard it's going to be. And you know you have to work doubly hard because you are black," sums up one unemployed divorced mother.

These low-income group members, moreover, have a strong work ethic. The unemployed want to work, and the employed want better jobs. This ethic is not based on self-fulfillment so much as it is on hard economic necessity. Participants are most pragmatic about the reasons for working: survival and paying the bills. Other reasons for working -- getting out of the house, helping others -- are sometimes volunteered, but the consensus is that work maps the only real route out of poverty. To most participants, the temptations found in the streets -- hustling and drugs -- or in the welfare cycle lead inescapably to dead ends.

So they do try. They rise early; they read the want ads; they contact government offices. They go back to school to get their GED. They enroll in jobs programs. Some work and study at the same time. These individuals want to work and they want to achieve the American Dream through working. Unfortunately, however, many do not know how to overcome the obstacles in their way.

<u>What can be done to help participants earn their way out?</u>

According to participants, attempts by the government and others to help in the form of jobs programs have a mixed record. Many participants have experience with a wide variety of jobs programs, including CETA, the Department of Human Resources, OIC, Martin Community Action, LEEO, UPO, Job Corps, the District's Summer Youth Program, the Urban League, Community of Hope, the ARCH Program, WOW, Jubilee Jobs, WIN, JOBS, the Department of Education, the District's Rehabilitation Center, Calvary Church, ORC, and People's Involvement Corporation. UPO and JOBS are seen as the most successful, in terms of helping participants secure and retain employment.

While, for the most part, participants believe jobs programs are good and can work if people apply themselves, in their personal experience such programs typically result in only marginal, temporary benefit. Many either did not get jobs after completing a program, or if they did, they left after

three or six months because of personal reasons such as family responsibilities.

Participants are somewhat cynical about jobs programs. They question the sincerity of some program personnel, explaining that some caseworkers seem only to be trying to meet their quotas and are not really concerned about helping the clients. Group members also are skeptical about the bureaucracy involved in the programs. Several recount incidents in which they first had to get on welfare in order to participate in a program, or had to enroll in a training program to get a job they had already won.

Despite these unfavorable experiences, participants tend to be positive about jobs programs for two reasons. First, the main benefit of jobs programs is that they provide a helpful structure. Interacting with someone concerned about how they were progressing helped keep some people on track and working to benefit from the opportunities presented by the programs. Structure is a missing element in many participants' lives; programs that provide it are beneficial.

Second, participants found two particular kinds of programs helpful. Programs that teach job preparation skills (such as how to look for a job, how to interview and sell yourself) are seen as more useful than those that provide training for specific skills. And participants also appreciated on-the-job training programs. Participants are unanimous in their belief that only skills-training programs which actually place clients in a job are truly helpful. Too many have had the experience of going through a program and then finding no job when they finished, either because they still had no experience in the field or because there were no jobs available.

Participants' ideas about what job skills would be helpful to them in the D.C. market range from the pragmatic to fantasies about professional careers. Both men and women clearly feel that "computers" represent a key to the future. Beyond that, women tend on the whole to make more realistic suggestions -- ranging from typing and word processing to health care skills -- while men choose such skills as those of a doctor, lawyer, businessman, or teacher -- options which, at this point in their lives, probably are not viable.

When the discussions moved from jobs programs to services that could be provided by other sources, participants' advice for employers was similar to what they advocate for jobs programs: more on-the-job training. They

suggest primarily that employers be more open to giving people a chance, letting them work at a substandard wage while they train and then raising their wage if they do well. It is important, too, that employers provide promotional opportunities. These people do not want to be mired in a job that is going nowhere. They are willing to pay their dues with low wages at entry, but they want to be moved up, to have the opportunity to advance. Other suggestions include flexible hours, better benefits, better wages, and better communication from employers.

While all participants agree that churches can conceivably be helpful, they are unable to specify how, other than to say that a referral offered by a church would be useful to people who have trouble getting jobs.

When it comes to what they can do to help themselves and others find jobs, participants think primarily of social networking, of blacks who have jobs helping others who do not. The groups seemed to be inspired by the sense of community and comradeship that developed during the focus group sessions. Invariably, they would affirm that working together in such groups could help them. "I'd like to see more programs like this. People getting together and talking helps," says one unemployed man. Another agrees, "When you go to church, mainly you're listening. There's not too many places you can go and be heard, like we're doing now."

This response suggests that one missing component of many programs may be an emotional support system. For men in particular, who have a hard time finding outlets for and communicating their feelings, group support structures would seem promising. Such structures might also encourage their desire to work together to combat racism. Moreover, there is certainly a social consciousness among participants that could be tapped. Many participants mention community work they do and describe social service-oriented employment they would like to secure. They want to help others as well as themselves.

Although it breaks no new ground to say so, any attempt to help low-income black Washingtonians work their way out of poverty must include a strong emphasis on education. The need for education is a central theme throughout these discussions. When asked what they regret, people say forsaking their education; when asked about dreams for their children, they dream of college; when asked what most hampers them in getting a job, they cite lack of education and/or experience; when asked how to help a child in

their neighborhood avoid poverty, they put education in the number one spot; and when asked about racism, they proffer education as an equalizer.

Indeed, participants are quite optimistic about the equalizing role education can play in a racist society. They feel that even though a black person might be educated at UDC and a white person at Harvard, education would still help put the races on the same level. "Say I'm competing with a white man for the job -- same education, same IQ. I lose the job, but I still got my education; I can go elsewhere," is the way one employed man expresses the idea.

Finally, some strategy is needed to help both children and adults steer clear of the street life. Participants' first idea of how to help children avoid growing up to be poor is to give them an education. They go on to talk, not about providing jobs for kids when they grow up, but about helping children step around the pitfalls of drugs and crime. Participants are adamant about the need to give children love, faith, and discipline, and to provide a positive role model.

Conclusions and recommendations

The remarks of these four groups of people reverberate with a number of recurring themes. If listened to carefully, the themes point toward some of the answers that the Washington community must respond with in any program designed to help people out of poverty.

1. The dreams, aspirations, and hopes of these low-income blacks are hardly different from those of the rest of the population: a good job, a home, a stable family, and a chance to get ahead. This suggests that these people neither accept their circumstances nor feel they will remain trapped in poverty forever; few believe that things will never be different. Given such strong motivation, these people are clearly receptive to being helped. Hence, efforts to increase poor people's earnings from employment appear worth pursuing.

2. Participants want to work, but many do not have either the skills or the understanding of how to find work. Their self-appraisal may not be particularly realistic, and they may feel that they can achieve much more than they really can, but the desire to try is there. We have enumerated the many difficult circumstances they experience in trying to enter and remain in the job market. What they need to enhance their desire and

willingness to work is a strategy for addressing these difficulties. They need practical assistance.

3. These people want a chance, and they know that experience is the key. If they were devising a system to help themselves, it would be one that provides them with that experience. They believe that if they can get on the job wagon, they will be able to ride it a long way. Exploring ways to encourage employers to hire low-income workers with limited experience and give them a chance, therefore, may be an important consideration in devising effective earnings strategies.

4. Among some participants, there is defeatism, and a marked tendency to look at the underground economy or welfare as a way to get by. Therefore, the positive reinforcement and reassurance of family, friends, and peers are essential for keeping those with weaker motivation or greater burdens from giving in. A program that only deals with individuals and poverty misses the broader need to set standards and reinforce value mechanisms within the society and, as importantly, the family. Both are essential.

APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP QUOTES

Lifestyle, circumstances

A typical day

The high point of my day is I made it through the day without drinking or drugging. The low part is I don't have a job.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I get up at 7:00, dress my kids, send 'em to day care, do my housework, cook, watch TV, sleep for an hour. Around 4:00 they come home. Getting my kids off to school is the high point. Just being there is my low point.

Female, 28, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I get up at nine, feed my daughter, look through the paper for jobs, call 'em for about an hour, and watch TV the rest of the time. The high point is looking for jobs; the low part is not working at all.

Female, 21, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I get up at 6:30 in the morning and have instant coffee and watch the morning news. Then I start calling to get my son up.

Female, 50, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Half the time, I don't get up in the morning. I just lay there and look at the ceiling and figure how to get out of the bed. Sometimes I'm scared to get out of the bed. You never know what's going to happen. I'm scared to see what my two sons is doing.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

My low point is walking in at 8:30 and high point is leaving at 5:00. I watch TV in the evening. If it's not too hot, I might go visit some of my girlfriends.

Female, 36, 11th Grade, Secretary

My high point is getting up every morning, period. I prepare my kids off for day camp. I go to a lot of meetings and stuff in the evenings.

Female, 31, 2 Years College, Unemployed

My high point is that I get to see another day with my daughter (she just turned three). I don't like TV. I like to read, go out to the clubs with my girlfriends.

Female, 21, Refused*, Cable TV Worker

I don't watch much TV. I have to do cleaning, and I study in the morning, work in the afternoon. Sometimes I don't get home till 9:00 or 10:00 at night, so I'm ready to hit the bed.

Female, 32, 11th Grade, Cashier

My high point is after I get to work and I see my boss. That man is fine; he compliments my work and makes me feel good. My low point is once a month when I feel down. I drive and go out to the harbor. Last weekend I rented a boat and went out on the water, first time in my life. I've been oppressed and not taking life and enjoying it.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

I read my Bible and I pray: that's the high point. My low point is if I don't pray, if I don't be nice to somebody. I go to the gym with some brothers from the church for fun. I want to hang around them to stay strong with the Lord.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

I get up early, move my car, go for long walks. I always eat a good breakfast, call my daughter, and I work, go to lunch. Every day I go to NA meeting in the evening. What I like best is when I get home, take a shower, and go to NA meeting, with people trying to save my life. For fun I talk to pretty women.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I'm in a program for ex-offenders, LEO, which is supposed to help. I'm up at 6:30, go to classes from 8:30 to 11:30. If I don't have a job interview, things get pretty hectic 'cause I don't have anything to do. My mind starts to wander 'cause I think about making money. I might pickpocket somebody, go around the corner and steal something. The lowest point of the day is when I have to get up in the morning. For fun, TV don't interest me too much. Ain't nothing really to distract my mind.

Male, 40, 11th Grade, Unemployed

The high point of my day is getting up, knowing what I got to do, and just getting through that day. I spend a lot of time with my son -- he's three -- mostly on weekends. I watch a lot of movies on TV.

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*Respondents are categorized by sex, age, grade completed, and employment status. When a respondent declined to provide information in one of those categories, we have so indicated by using the word "Refused."

Male, 18, 7th Grade, Unemployed

I get up about 6:00, go play basketball till about 10:00; then I go job hunting. I watch basketball on TV, listen to radio.

Male, 35, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I got a bike for Christmas. Sometimes it's so hectic, I just set off and ride it.

Male, 32, 10th Grade, Maintenance

I like to party. When I'm not, I like to play football.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Maintenance

I got two kids; I'm a single parent. I don't need no woman, no hassle. When I get home, I get my kids (seven and five, girls) and we hang out. It's fun. For child care, their grandmother takes care of them.

Male, 26, 12th Grade, Janitor

I'm 19. I live with my mother. I play basketball and football for fun.

Male, 19, 12th Grade, Laborer

Most running I do is run down to the liquor store about five to nine. I run on down there; I usually walk back.

Male, 38, 12th Grade, Supermarket

Who lives with you?

I live in a four-bedroom house with my two kids.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I live in a three-bedroom house: my son, myself and my mom.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

My husband is handicapped. We have three kids. My fifteen-year-old daughter works.

Female, 41, 7th Grade, Unemployed

I have four sons. I live with two of them. We have a two-bedroom apartment.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I live in a two-bedroom house with my mother and my daughter.

Female, 48, 12th Grade, Clerk Typist

I live in a two-bedroom apartment with my niece.

Female, 43, 7th Grade, Unemployed

I live in a three-bedroom apartment with my three sons and my husband. They all work.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Secretary

I came over from Jamaica with a family that moved here. I lost my apartment and ended up living in a shelter.

Female, 55, 12th Grade, Domestic

I live at home with my father, two brothers, and two sisters. We all help pay the rent.

Female, 21, Refused, Cable TV Worker

I live in a two-bedroom apartment. I live with my brother. He works.

Male, 40, 11th Grade, Unemployed

I'm 17. I've been locked up twice. I live in an apartment with my mother and brother.

Male, 17, 11th Grade, Unemployed

I have a four-bedroom house.

Male, 35, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I've got two kids -- no, five: two of my own and three by marriage. I live in a three-bedroom house with my wife and kids.

Male, 32, 10th Grade, Maintenance

I'm 19. I live with my mother in an apartment. My mother works also. I have no kids, but there's probably one on the way.

Male, 19, 12th Grade, Laborer

I'm single. I have one kid, a son, and I stay with a friend.

Male, 22, 10th Grade, Carrier

I'm single. I have no kids. I stay with my grandmother in a two-bedroom apartment.

Male, 31, 7th Grade, Construction

Doing life over

There are not many things I'd change. I'd have had my son older. I'd have stayed in the military. The good decisions were the jobs program.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I would have stayed in school and listened to my elders a little bit more. My good decision was to go back to get my GED and to stop drugging.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I wish I'd stayed in New York. I wouldn't have had any children; I would have gone to college. I came to Washington, met somebody, and my stomach started growing. If I'd stayed in New York, I would have finished my career

as an artist. Now I'm on public assistance. I haven't made any good decisions. Every decision I've made is a flop -- even down to my kids.

Female, Refused, Refused, Unemployed

I would have had my daughter at an older age, so I'd be financially situated to take care of her better. I was eighteen. My good decision was to finish high school.

Female, 21, 12th Grade, Unemployed

As far as school, I think I should've been into school a little more, and been into ball a little more, but I was kind of into the streets, too. My attitude wasn't right. If I had it to do over, I'd been a lot more into school and sports because now I see how sports is getting a lot of them over.

Male, 38, 12th Grade, Supermarket

Since coming out of high school, the first mistake I made is not staying in school. One of the best things I did do was go into military, see some of the world, see and experience a lot of things the average guy from D.C. will never do. Right now, I'm regrouping, trying to get myself back together. My downfall came from one of these D.C. women. I got messed over, blew my military career, coming home to chase after this woman. And my daughter -- well, I thought she was at the time -- I been through a lot.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Maintenance

I went into a wrong pattern. By the time I was four or five, I was in group homes, my mother had a nervous breakdown, and I had to deal with a lot of rough guys. I've got 13 or 14 brothers, some of them not in D.C. I don't even know them. The worst decision I made was the kind of guys I was hanging out with. I've been through a lot. My best decision was when I first came up here with one of my brothers. I'm originally from North Carolina.

Male, 23, 9th Grade, Unemployed

When I first got out of high school, I had a grant for South Carolina College. I really messed up and I had to come home. That was the worst decision. My best decision was going back to Prince George's Community College, taking a course in computers.

Male, 27, 12th Grade, Clerk

Where would you like to be ten years from now?

I'd have a second child, a two-bedroom apartment, a car, and a job -- a decent-paying job -- and that's going to happen before ten years.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

I'll be financially stable, at the height of my profession, which is the banking industry. Also, I'll be living in a condo, with only my son, because I have no thoughts of marriage at this point.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I'm planning on being in a house and being an administrator or boss, heading my own business.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I'm darn near 50. I don't know. I'd like a house, a car, a husband, and to be as far away from my kids as possible.

Female, Refused, Refused, Unemployed

In ten years, I'll be out on disability. I'm too young to retire, so. . . .

Female, 36, 11th Grade, Secretary

I would like to have my own house, and my health and strength.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I'll be in my 60s, and I hope I'm out of the shelter and living a more happy life.

Female, 55, 12th Grade, Domestic

I hope to be busy. I want a better job, enjoying life, playing with children. I plan to have better living conditions and be helping people.

Female, Refused, Refused, Unemployed

I want to have a house before that time. Me and a friend are going into a mobile service business that hopefully will be prosperous and also do some work with kids. We hope to have a center for kids in ten years.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

Since 1974, I've been under parole, and I got off parole this year. It's a new feeling to me. I'm free and I didn't get into any trouble. I'm going to do something in cosmetology, hope I'll have my own shop by them. I know I'm going to do something self-employed.

Male, 41, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I may be a doctor. I'll watch over my mother, 'cause if it weren't for her, I wouldn't be here right now. I'll get married and have a family.

Male, 16, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I see myself as a businessman, helping the community. I'd like to see myself in a house, not drowning myself into this thing of unemployment.

Male, 32, 9th Grade, Unemployed

I have 24 years in district government, and going through an alcoholic program. Alcohol played a big part, and now I've survived three years, and I think I'll be just blessing and having somewhere to go in the evening.

Male, 49, 11th Grade, Unemployed

I would like to be healthier, wealthier and wiser.

Male, 33, 12th Grade, Construction

I would like to see myself in the medical field, running something like a nursing home. I did that work: working with handicapped children and adults, fitting them with their house. I do construction work now, but I like medical better.

Male, 31, 7th Grade, Construction

I'd like to see my children grow up in an environment that's not like the one I grew up in.

Male, 33, 12th Grade, Consultant

Welfare

What do you think of when you hear the word welfare? If you were making a show called "Life On Welfare," what would you show?

I'd express how it feels to have to sit at home and wait for a check, rather than have the opportunity to have a job every day. I'd show people going through programs and trying to benefit themselves, and how your money is really limited. It's not easy, although a lot of people are abusing the system.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

You need to show people who are not on public assistance that it's not for your own advantages, but only a temporary means of survival. It's not like you're going to go get it and never work again.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

The good side of welfare is the people who are really trying to do something with their check. The other 90% sit around either giving money to their man or wasting it.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

People who work there have very nasty attitudes. You need to start in the Department of Welfare. The people who work there act like it's their money. But they're harassing everyone who goes there.

Female, 43, 7th Grade, Unemployed

When you hear that word, people look at you like you're lazy -- and that's not true. Just because you don't see me go to work in the morning doesn't mean I don't go. And just because I get welfare doesn't mean I'm going to get it all my life. Sure, you have people who get it who don't need it, but you have people who really do need this little bit of money. It's not enough money to live on, but a little is better than none. The biggest help is the Medicaid.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

I would show how far you could go off of $268 a month. I'd try to put myself in their place. The welfare people don't explain stuff to you. Every bit of money I make, I have to tell these people. You try to help yourself a little; they try to pull you down. You can't do this and you can't do that. How can I go to school if I can't have 80 cents to catch the bus?

Female, 21, Refused, Cable TV Worker

I think of hopelessness. Before, I used to think everybody on welfare was lazy, 'cause I never had no trouble getting a job. Then I had a lot of girlfriends who were on it. And once you get going that way, it's almost impossible to come out of it, 'cause so many people think the way I used to think.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I was disabled: that's how I received it. Once I was able to go back to work, I got off it. I grew up on welfare. My mother wasn't lazy, but having five or six kids, it's hard for a woman to work and raise five or six kids. In her situation, it's best to be on assistance.

Male, 40, 11th Grade, Unemployed

When I hear 'welfare,' I grow jealous, really. I tried to get on food stamps, but if you don't have custody of the kids, you can't get nothing. They ought to do something for a single man till he gets back on his feet, so he doesn't have to go to the streets. First of the month, everything gets lively, everything's kicking, everybody gets new outfits on; then, after three or four days, back to regular for another 30 days. First of the

month was a happy day, Mother's Day. But after that. . . .

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Unemployed

People on welfare for years need some training for a job, and people on the streets, homeless, need to be able to get welfare.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

You're getting $375 a month. I could take care of my bills and my apartment, but for my free time, I could go out and better myself, get somewhere.

Male, 26, 12th Grade, Janitor

You got people getting welfare, living better than we are, and we're working every day. I got an aunt on public assistance. She always had a house, a new car, sitting at home, getting a check.

Male, Refused, Refused, Unemployed

It's helpful to some people. My father brought us up here: thirteen kids. Him and my ma broke up. She was on it for a while, after she had a couple of nervous breakdowns.

Male, 23, 9th Grade, Unemployed

Welfare myths and realities

It's easy to get on welfare.

Nope, 'cause they ask you who you staying with, how many kids, who done this. They just want to get into your business. People feel offended when they go to get welfare.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

It's dumb to get a job when you can get welfare.

No, why would you want to wait once a month to get a check, when you can get a check every week or two weeks? And you can earn more, and do what you want with your money. And you don't have to fill out a slip telling if you got money from somewhere else. What you do with your money that you work for is your business.

Female, 43, 7th Grade, Unemployed

False. Welfare is harassment; you don't need to go through that. I had to leave my part-time job, I couldn't feed my two boys, and I had to go back to welfare. Welfare is hell.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

False. When I get paid on Mondays and Tuesdays, I feel good because I did this myself. When my daughter was born, I gave myself a certain amount of time to get off welfare. It takes something out of you; it makes you feel low. It's true, if your child is old enough to go to school, why you sitting at home? If you can't read and write, you can learn.

Female, 21, Refused, Cable TV Worker

True. It's like drugs: once you get used to doing something -- used to free money -- even when you get a job, you're going to try and sneak and still get that money.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Unemployed

It depends on how much skills you have. If you're a high school dropout, in most cases female, with three or four kids, living with her family, so most of that money is not also being spent on bills and kids, she got money to go out to Gogo's and party with. But if you're living with your family and all of a sudden the sole supporter passes, then you can't do it unless you are on welfare.

Male, 24, 12th Grade, Unemployed

People who are working should be proud; people who are on welfare should be ashamed.

True. When I was working security, I worked half a day to make a salary I was satisfied with. I used to get angry at people on welfare got the same thing I got and I was out there breaking my back. I did feel proud, and sometimes I do think those people should feel ashamed, not even paying much attention to their kids.

Male, 24, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Welfare kids will grow up to be welfare parents.

Not necessarily. It's 50/50, but some say I don't want to live like that; I want a little more.

Male, 32, 10th Grade, Maintenance

It's up to the parent -- how much interest they show in their kids and their future. Today, as long as their kids come home with some money, the parents don't care what the kids doing.

Unidentified Male -- Group 4

How does it feel to get off welfare?

Most I know are glad to be off, but a few say they miss the benefits of Medicaid, rather than anything else.

Female, 38, 8th Grade, Unemployed

Most of the people feel as though they should've stayed on, the pay is not that great, they miss the food stamps, and they need the Medicaid.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

I've been on that. It's like God lifted a heavy burden on my back; it seemed like I had shackles. They created this program called JOBS, and I think it's a dynamite program. They got me on my feet, and that's the only thing welfare did for me.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

When I got off welfare, I cried. I'm glad I got a job. I'm still at the same job and I love it.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Secretary

Working

Do most of the people you know have jobs? Where do people get money if they don't have a job or get welfare?

Most work. They say it's just to get out of the house, to avoid the monotony.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Most work -- the same job for years. Survival is what makes them work.

Female, 41, 7th Grade, Unemployed

Everybody I know works, but the reason is self-independence. They don't want charity. They work to get what they want.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

People who don't work get money from their parents or from drugs.

Female, 33, 11th Grade, Unemployed

They do housekeeping on the side, babysitting on the side, and they sell their body.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

What pushes me to work is my children and to pay bills, of course. Those who don't are caught up in crack and dealing drugs. They think they can

earn more money dealing drugs than what I get at a minimum wage job at McDonald's.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

They are out there selling drugs. The women selling their bodies. Some men doing the same thing: trying to look like a woman and selling their bodies.

Unidentified Male -- Group 3

There's honest people out there, too -- temporary jobs. Not everybody's hustling. Some have some sense; they don't want to go to jail.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

Some people try to better themselves; some don't. They just want the quick, fast money. Some of them have been to school, and even with degrees. They figure they get more money hustling. I tell them I've been there, and it didn't pay.

Male, 31, 7th Grade, Construction

Work histories: what have you been doing the past five years? What's the best job you ever had?

I was employed at XXXXXXX Foods. I had family problems, so I had to stop. I'm unemployed now. I'm looking forward to going back to work, but first I've got to get my son situated. Cashiering was my best job.

Female, 50, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I moved here from Norfolk, Virginia, in 19XX. I was with the XXXXXXXX Department for eight years. I have a discrimination complaint ongoing with them. I had a nervous breakdown because of it. I had to resign due to stress and depression. The agency I was in, you don't stand a chance being a black person. I'm doing temporary services now.

Female, 38, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I worked the last five years, but I had to stop due to drug addiction. My favorite job was supervising office work.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I recently had a baby. My best job was cleaning homes and offices.

Female, 27, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I had to stop work because of my back. My best job was pricing clothes.

Female, 41, 7th Grade, Unemployed

I worked the last five years, but I got fired. I had child care problems. My best job was a clerical job.

Female, 39, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I work at the XXXXXXXXX on H Street, N.E. I like the job, but not the people there. I just started in March -- the first job I ever went to -- and it's all blacks working there, and they discriminate against each other. The job I had at first was a homemaker, working with old people and handicapped. I loved it, but it was too painful when you went to somebody's house and they passed away, so I couldn't deal with it.

Female, 32, 11th Grade, Cashier

My best job was a horticulturalist at the Hyatt Regency. I've been employed most of the last five years, but I had to leave because of a car accident.

Female, 31, 2 Years College, Unemployed

I've been working for last two years and four months. First I was on welfare and went to school. I got training and got a job, because I want my own money.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Secretary

I work at the Shiloh Family Life center. It's the best job I've ever had. Other jobs I had were housekeeping and janitorial. I've learned a lot, enhanced my secretarial skills, opened the door for me to continue my training. It doesn't seem like a job in some sense. If I've done something wrong, my boss will help me and tell me -- constructive criticism.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

My best job was working with the potato chip company. Everybody was friendly, and I like working with my hands. You didn't have to bother with nobody; work on a machine by myself.

Female, 32, 11th Grade, Cashier

I came to D.C. in 1981 and I didn't know anybody or how to get around. I got a job in security. I got beat and everything. Mostly I been working. Now I'm a porter. My best work was as a cook.

Male, 23, 12th Grade, Porter

I'll be XX next week. My mother gave me away when I was born. I went in the Army in 19XX, got out in 'XX, worked for XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX from 'XX to 'XX, and then to XXXXXXXXXtill 1982. I started using drugs bad, but I kept jobs. Went to broadcasting school, was a disc jockey at WXXX for a little while. Right after the riot, they was trying to get blacks in the radio business. Went to school for XXXXXXXXXXX -- just trying to use my GI Bill. Jobs was like automatic for me, had my choice. I went to jail for

the first time when I was XX -- first time I got a girl with drugs -- and I got there and America forgot about all the time I was okay. Since then, I drove a cab, worked for city of XXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXXXXXXX I went into drug treatment, but I've had no success at getting jobs since then. I went for a job to scrub floors at Soldiers' Home, and they told me I had to have a police clearance; I wasn't good enough. My record's not that bad -- never hurt no one -- just drugs. I liked being a Metro bus driver the best.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I'm unemployed. I've been to school to be a mechanic. All the jobs I've been trying to get they tell me I don't have enough experience, or I need to be certified, which takes two years of OJT. I went down to the government buildings, took civil service tests, checking around the government every day, trying to get back into my field. Meantime, I was working security for government, about seven or eight months. Recently I left because the 10 to 12 hours a day was conflicting. I have a child to support and take care of, and the child's not in school right now because the mother lost her job. The mother is unemployed. She's been on 60 interviews, and they all tell her the same thing: she needs experience. I've worked about three-fourths of the time the last five years. My favorite job was working with an engineer.

Male, 24, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I could get a job and keep it. When I got tired of it, I just gave it up. Once I got a record, things changed; jobs wasn't easy to get. The best job was a mail clerk.

Male, 40, 11th Grade, Unemployed

I'm 17, I'm still in high school, and I've been locked up twice in juvenile. I'm unemployed. I will go to college if I decide to go.

Male, 17, 11th Grade, Unemployed

I didn't graduate from high school, but I'm taking a course now to get my GED. I'm going to make an Army career. When I was coming up, I got in a lot of trouble, stealing cars with my buddies. I work now, in an electricians' union. Three days out of the week I go to school.

Male, 18, 7th Grade, Unemployed

I'm 37. I was in the service for four years, came out and went to truck driver school for four years -- haven't been able to get a job from it. I've been a porter, cab driver, and school bus driver. I liked being a

porter the best.

Male, 35, 10th Grade, Unemployed

What is the job market like in D.C.? What advice would you give to a country cousin looking for work here?

I'll ask them if they have any type of training. If not, they better settle for a damn minimum-wage job.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

If you didn't go to school, go back and get an education. It's hard to find a job if you don't have the education. Nowadays, you have to start from the bottom and work your way up. I'd tell 'em to try Virginia and suburban areas.

Female, 27, 10th Grade, Unemployed

There's a link missing in this area. There's no industry. D.C. is mostly just government.

Male, 40, 11th Grade, Unemployed

I'd tell them to move to Maryland. You have a better chance there. My brother got two jobs there.

Male, 16, 10th Grade, Unemployed

If you have a record, then it gets harder. If you got any crimes of distrust on your record, you can forget working in a place of value.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

What skill would help you get a job?

I have writing skills. I'm a student at UDC in Math, Education, and English is my minor. I'm looking for the degree.

Female, 32, College, Unemployed

I have a certificate in banking skills, nursing assistance, and supervisory experience. I don't need new skills, just a job utilizing the ones I have.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I already have skills in keypunch and supervision. I just want to be a business administrator.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I could use artist and drafting skills. My latest school was data entry. Computers is the one paying the money.

Female, 30, 12th grade, Unemployed

I want to do woodcrafting and sewing. I like the skills I have now.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

I would like to be a doctor. We need a lot of medical help in the world.

Male, 18, 7th Grade, Unemployed

I'd like to be a teacher, try to help kids.

Male, 22, 9th Grade, Unemployed

What are some obstacles to getting a job?

For me, it was child care. And I've never been to college. And discrimination. No college -- you're black and you're dumb.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

Experience, do you have experience? I get so tired of that. How do I get the experience if I don't get the job?

Female, 38, 12th Grade, Unemployed

It's what we were taught in school: you have to learn how to sell yourself.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Secretary

I have to babysit 24 hours a day for my three sons. They're two, eight, and 12 years old.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

Education is the basis for not working. I grew up in Southeast. I could see some are hustling this way, that way, so good kids got to go to school where they had better programs.

Male, 32, 9th Grade, Unemployed

Seems like society takes for granted the black male is unemployed. So they give the black woman some money. They always got Lorton and the D.C. jail for us.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Personal circumstances are an obstacle, and substance abuse.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Jobs Programs

What programs have you worked on? Were there requirements? Did they work?

First I went to Smith Business School, then I went to JOBS, which stands for Job Opportunities in Better something. They got me a nice job: three months' training and three months' on-the-job-training.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

I've been in three programs. I was in CETA in Howard Hospital. Another was XXX as a painter, making $9.00 an hour, but the only reason I'm not still there is because a painter threw a big bucket of paint at me and I pushed him back. And the other one was the Washington Urban League on-the-job training job I'm working on now. You had to have a three-grade gain in reading in order to get in the job program. I think these programs help. I wasn't in one, but I went to the League to get my GED and they gave me confidence; they showed me that if you want to do it, you can.

Female, 32, 11th Grade, Cashier

I was in WOW but I couldn't get a job, because everywhere I went they said not enough experience, so I just gave up. Then I went to Urban League for word processing for six months. That didn't help me get no job. The people on the property I live helped me get a job. But the training was valuable.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Secretary

Non-recipients of welfare couldn't get on UPO. So I went and got on welfare so I could get the program.

Female, 48, 12th Grade, Clerk Typist

I started in Area C at D.C. General, through the Department of Human Resources. They were training me to keep records, but I wasn't qualified to do that -- no high school diploma -- and they were keeping me busy, to keep me away from drugs. So now I have that skill, but it's frustrating because I can't get a job. I was also trained as a housekeeper. USA Academy of Truck Drivers trained me, but after I graduated, when I went to see about a job, they said I didn't have enough time in.

Male, 35, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I'm in LEO. They're setting up things for you like references and they're teaching you hope.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I went to Diesel Institute of America and got my training. For the most part, about 80%, I learned a skill, but it's still not what I needed to do what I wanted to do. But it don't just stop there: I still had to go further and work for a while and get certified.

Male, 24, 12th Grade, Unemployed

The only thing they really give you is a time schedule. A little bit of electricity, a little bit of bookkeeping, typing -- nothing about explaining

things to you, how to go about this. The people running the place, they've got a job. You are in the process of trying to get one.

Male, 49, 11th Grade, Unemployed

But the job program introduces me and lets other people know about me.

Unidentified Male -- Group 3

It doesn't matter if you go to one of these schools. You going to need OJT training, no matter what the job is.

Unidentified Male -- Group 3

At OIC, they trained me as a carpenter in the Job Corps. I got tired trying to get that quick money and getting into jams. The Community of Hope is good. They show you how to interview.

Male, 31, 7th Grade, Construction

OIC didn't do nothing for me. I had to go through OIC to get in the Labor Department. They didn't teach me nothing, and sent me a certificate saying I went through a six-week course, and I hadn't. I'm serious: I stayed there 15 minutes.

Male, 26, 12th Grade, Janitor

The job I got now I got through XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, and they made us go to these classes, trained us for supermarket work. We had three months of classes. It ended up helping us get a job in this new supermarket that opened, but as far as positions in the store, it didn't help. And the way they hired niggers off the street, I could have waited and gone on down. In fact, most of the ones in our class are the ones getting fired. I'm scared, don't know what's going on. They promised us a lot of stuff. But the ones they're walking, they're the class members.

Male, 38, 12th Grade, Supermarket

A lot of them give you the training, but a lot of it depends on what you do on their own. Nobody can guarantee you a job.

Male, 33, 12th Grade, Self-employed

I got in this construction thing one time. I was going to take up either electrical wiring or plumbing. They said when you complete, they give you tools and place you -- they teach you to work -- but if you wasn't ready, they wasn't going to work with you. But I messed around, got a settlement check from a car accident, and didn't even go back.

Unidentified Male -- Group 4

If you in a legit program, and you trying to work, you can get something out of it. But a lot of them are just getting paid for the people that come through it, and they don't care; they aren't genuine.

Male, 32, 10th Grade, Maintenance

Conclusion

What do you think about "The Cosby Show"?

It appeals to me, but it's not the American Dream. People have different aspirations.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

It epitomizes the American Dream, but it's also unrealistic.

Female, 32, Refused, Unemployed

It's realistic, but he does need to show a little of what is happening today as far as drugs. He hits home, but they have to hit a little bit more.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I like Bill Cosby because it doesn't stereotype black people as loud mouths. He's a doctor; she's a lawyer. All the kids go to school, and that's unusual. It's not negative; it's positive.

Female, 21, Refused, Cable TV Worker

It shows a lot: he is concerned about the kids, takes time with them. It shows what can be done at home, what a mother and a father can do.

Female, 36, 11th Grade, Secretary

This thing's pretty falsified. There aren't too many families where the mother is a lawyer and the father is a doctor and the kids don't get into too much trouble.

Male, 24, 12th Grade, Unemployed

It can happen. I got a cousin who's a judge and her husband is a doctor. They knew what they wanted and they went out and got it. It don't have to be no dream. It's a goal that you set. Why dream about it? Set the goal and go for it.

Male, 32, 10th Grade, Maintenance

But do they live like the Cosbys? You know how everything's perfect with the kids? Two people with them salaries can get together, sure, but that perfect, perfect, funny, funny -- I can't go for that.

Male, 38, 12th Grade, Supermarket

Could you ever live like the Cosbys?

I can, because if I work every day and stay on that job, I know I can get anything I want, because money will bring it.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

My odds are 10-to-1. And I don't "believe"; I know I'm gonna live like that. In the words of Jesse Jackson, I'm not gonna give up.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

A lot of people work hard, but they're just working to survive. Just working hard isn't the key. You need some other avenues: a job that's going to pay some money that will enable you to buy a home, a car. We can get jobs; every last one of us can get a job. I know people who work every day, and they don't live the Cosby lifestyle, and they been working 25 years. Hard work isn't the issue. The system is geared to keep a lot of us down. You can't get a job, because you don't have experience.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

Are there special circumstances that make it harder for blacks to work out of poverty?

There are stereotypical images against their color. I believe things will change.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

You bring on your own frustrations and problems a lot of times. You've got to stop low grading yourself. Looking back on history, the white man gave it to us, and it's up to us to plunge at it. You've got to keep going back to Jesse Jackson, that man that came out of the ghetto. Look what he did for himself. He applied himself. We sitting up here waiting for someone to apply us. We have to apply ourselves.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

Look at Jesse Jackson. He's trying to be the president, and they're not going to let a black man into the office. He's not going to be vice president, either. He came right there to the goal line and they told him he's not gonna make it.

Unidentified Female -- Group 1

A white person is not going to give blacks so much.

Female, 33, 11th Grade, Unemployed

We just have to be motivated. It's always been difficult. It looks like whites have more opportunities, but you have to want to do something in yourself, and stop thinking about how hard it's going to be. And you know you have to work doubly hard because you are black.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Because of our color, they don't want to hire us for jobs or pay us as much as white people.

Female, 21, 12th Grade, Unemployed

We ain't never gonna make it, unless we stick together. When we get somewhere, we forget about the people that are down.

Female, 27, 10th Grade, Unemployed

It's much harder for blacks. We don't have the networking system whites have. I got a uncle in somebody's office; I send a nephew down for a job. In return, you give my niece a job. We don't have the family support, the financial support. We've got a lot of odds against us.

Female, 32, Refused, Unemployed

A lot of black people look at it like "the white man gonna do this," and they don't realize that the white man can't keep you down. If you want to go, you can go. It's you keeping you down. They look at themselves with that negativity.

Female, 21, Refused, Cable TV Worker

Nobody get somewhere in life without a job, right? The white man might not be letting them get jobs.

Female, 41, 10th Grade, Secretary

It's not all white. Before you get to see that white man, half the time you looking at a black face, and they look at you like they're better and won't let you through that door. We're holding each other down.

Female, 38, 12th Grade, Unemployed

This is a white man's world, for real. The blacks are trying to get more into it. They can handle the job. But if it's between me and the Caucasian, who are they going to pick? It's a Caucasian running the place You still might get it, but it's going to be harder.

Male, 32, 11th Grade, Unemployed

At one time, there wasn't as many drugs on the street as now. All the white man wants us to do now is hustle and get us out of his way. White man got us doing what he wants us to do. You tell me how many brothers are bringing

drugs from overseas. We don't have to buy it, no, but we can't get a job like the white man -- so I'm going to take my chances and hustle.

Male, 26, 12th Grade, Janitor

You've got 12- or 13-year-olds walking around with more money than I got in my pocket.

Male, 26, 12th Grade, Janitor

One of the biggest reasons is the lack of unity among blacks. We have a lot of blacks in leadership roles who aren't doing a damn thing for people trying to make it. "If you ain't kissing his ass, he ain't looking for you." People forget where they come from when they get up in that hall.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Maintenance

How would you help ten people get jobs?

The people that's out there that is working should get everybody together and try to get them a job where they're working at.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

Churches could assist you. They will hire you from a church before they will hire you off the street. Because they stereotype people who go to church and those who don't.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Anyway we can help ourselves we should do so.

Female, 32, Refused, Unemployed

Give them on-the-job training. You don't have to pay them the wage they're going to make; give them half, but them raise them up. In the meantime, suggest they open a day-care center for the working mothers.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

Give them medical benefits, maternity leave, a training program to help them step up high. They need flexible working hours and personal days off for children to go to checkups. And they need a pleasant working environment. If you don't enjoy doing what you're doing. . . .

Unidentified Female -- Group 2

I would find me some funders, write a proposal, put in what I want, and get some financial support for job training, day-care, and transportation costs for those receiving public assistance.

Female, Refused, 12th Grade, Office Manager

I'd like to see more programs, programs like this: people going out, bringing people in. Getting together and talking -- it helps.

Unidentified Male -- Group 3

When you go to church, mainly you're listening. There's not too many places you can go and be heard, like we're doing now.

Male, 24, 12th Grade, Unemployed

They should cut back on the red tape. It should be what kind of job do you want? Can you do this? If the job is there, give it to me.

Male, 49, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Employers should learn how to talk to someone. They are like social workers. They act like the money is theirs -- and they're going be the lawyer, doctor, judge -- and you're there for help, and they giving you all this. It makes a person turn around and walk out. And some of the personnel office people do the same thing.

Unidentified Male -- Group 3

I would make a bid on housing contracts, cleaning contracts; then I would hire those ten guys and put them to work.

Male, 33, 12th Grade, Self-employed

I'd take them ten and look at their qualifications. Start out looking for jobs for them in black organizations, 'cause they'd be black out of this neighborhood. If they couldn't do nothing, I'd go a little farther, to some of these white companies.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Construction

I would tell them to show the ten people they can progress up the ladder. They need promotional opportunities and educational opportunities. Show them that they can learn more -- no dead end jobs.

Male, 29, 12th Grade, Unemployed

If you were a fairy godmother, how would you help a child?

I'd give them open education -- free college and all -- give them a job, and give them love and support. That's the most important.

Female, 32, 10th Grade, Unemployed

I'd put a curse on them that they never mess with drugs, always obey their mother, and always stay in school.

Female, 29, 9th Grade, Unemployed

You have to give them an open mind, an ability to learn, positive attitudes, and about a thousand helpings of motivation.

Female, 30, 12th Grade, Unemployed

I would give them love and confidence -- just stand behind him and tell him. And I'd try to be a role model. Look at me, kid: I'm still struggling.

Female, 21, Refused, Cable TV Worker

I would learn them the skills I had, even reading. You got a lot of illiterate people out here. Explain to them how to get a job, do mock interviews with them.

Unidentified Female -- Group 2

All kids need a mother and a father. The second thing is church, and the third is education.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

Give them a counselor, somebody they can talk to. Give them something to do -- they're energetic -- and have a place they can go, can hang out.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Porter

I would teach the kid to watch out for the trickery. With all this fast stuff, that don't really last long. You end up in the penitentiary for a long time, or dead.

Male, 28, 12th Grade, Unemployed

Today, these kids on the street, they're growing up quick and they're growing up fast. And on to big and better things at a much earlier age than we did. It's not what you tell them; it's the money they offering. I'm talking about wages, because they put 'em in a real hard labor job these days. . . .

Male, 23, 9th Grade, Unemployed

Take all the drugs out. It's one of the biggest problems young kids are having today.

Male, 32, 11th Grade, Unemployed

Unplug their beepers, give them better education, and give them a lot of love.

Male, 38, 12th Grade, Supermarket

I'd teach them to be themselves, love themselves.

Unidentified Male -- Group 4

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FOUR FOCUS GROUPS

Unemployed Women

Age	Employed	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Dependents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance
32	No	--	Single	2	College	Life	$5,000-$7,500	Yes
29	No	Cashier, Cleaning	Single	1	9th grade	Life	$2,500-$5,000	Yes
32	No	Dispatcher, Supervisor	Single	2	10th grade	Life	$0-$2,500	No
41	No	--	Married	3	7th grade	19	$2,500-$5,000	No
28	No	--	Single	3	10th grade	--	$0-$2,500	Yes
39	No	--	Divorced	3	12th grade	Life	$0-$2,500	Yes
21	No	Receptionist	Single	1	12th grade	Life	$2,500-$5,000	Yes
30	No	--	Single	1	12th grade	Life	$2,500-$5,000	Yes
50	No	Food store worker	Divorced	1	12th grade	26	--	Yes

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Unemployed Women (continued)

Age	Employed	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Dependents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance
38	No	Health aide	Single	2	12th grade	--	Refused	Yes
--	No	Public school worker	Divorced	1	12th grade	Life	Refused	No
33	No	Clerk/typist	Single	2	11th grade	Life	$0-$2,500	Yes
27	No	--	Single	2	10th grade	--	Over $12,500	No
38	No	--	Single	2	8th grade	7	$0-$2,500	Yes

Employed Women

Age	Em-ployed	Occupation	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Depen-dents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance
21	Yes	Cable TV installer	Food service, Security guard	Single	1	Refused	Life	$0-$2,500	Yes
53	Yes	Domestic	Domestic	Single	2	10th grade	12	Refused	Yes
36	Yes	Secretary	Clerk/typist	Single	1	11th grade	Life	Over $12,500	No
38	No	--	Temporary worker	Single	--	12th grade	13	$0-$2,500	No
43	No	--	--	Single	4	7th grade	Life	Refused	Yes
31	No	--	--	Single	2	2 years college	Life	Refused	Yes
--	Yes	Secretary	--	Married	4	10th grade	41	Over $12,500	No
--	Yes	Office manager	Housekeeper	Single	2	12th grade	Life	$10,000-$12,500	No

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Employed Women (continued)

Age	Em-ployed	Occupation	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Depen-dents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance
36	Yes	Admin. assistant	Secretary, Typist	Single	4	12th grade	Life	$0-$2,500	No
32	Yes	Cashier	Homemaker, Painter	Single	2	11th grade	Life	$5,000-$7,500	Yes
39	Yes	--	Clerk/typist	Single	1	12th grade	Life	Refused	Refused
55	Yes	Domestic	Domestic	Single	1	12th grade	18	$0-$2,500	No

Unemployed Men

Age	Em-ployed	Occupation	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Depen-dents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance	Hourly Wage
41	No	--	Retail Cleaning	Divorced	None	12th grade	18 months	Over $12,500	No	$8-$10
--	No	--	--	Single	None	8th grade	--	$0-$2,500	No	Refused
35	No	--	Landscaper, Truck driver	Single	--	10th grade	Life	$0-$2,500	No	$5
28	Yes	Porter	Dishwasher	Single	3	12th grade	8	Refused	No	$5
24	No	--	Maintenance, Security	Single	1	12th grade	Life	Over $12,500	No	Refused
16	Yes	--	--	Single	--	10th grade	Life	$2,500-$5,000	Yes	Refused
44	No	--	Laborer	Married	2	5th grade	20	Over $12,500	No	Refused
17	No	--	--	Single	None	11th grade	Life	$2,500-$5,000	No	N/A

Unemployed Men (continued)

Age	Em-ployed	Occupation	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Depen-dents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance	Hourly Wage
18	No	--	--	Single	2	7th grade	16	$2,500-$5,000	No	$6.50
31	No	--	Laborer	Single	2	7th grade	Life	Refused	No	$7.00
49	No	--	Janitor	Divorced	None	11th grade	Life	Refused	--	$7.25
28	No	--	Warehouse	Single	1	12th grade	20	Over $12,500	No	Refused
14	No	--	--	Single	--	8th grade	--	Refused	Yes	N/A
49	No	--	Letter carrier, Bus driver	Married	None	12th grade	Life	$0-$2,500	No	$9.00
--	No	--	--	Married	4	7th grade	--	$10,000-$12,500	Refused	Refused
40	No	--	Mail clerk, Laborer	Single	None	11th grade	Life	$10,000-$12,500	Refused	$5.00
32	No	--	--	Single	--	9th grade	22	Over $12,500	No	$4.50

Employed Men

Age	Em-ployed	Occupation	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Depen-dents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance	Hourly Wage
22	Yes	Beauty professional	Banquet helper, Carpet cleaner	Single	None	12th grade	5	Refused	No	$5.00
20	No	--	Fast food, Maintenance	Single	--	10th grade	Life	$10,000-$12,500	No	$4.25
33	Yes	--	Construc-tion	Single	None	12th grade	24	Over $12,500	No	Refused
26	Yes	Janitor	Cashier, Porter	Single	2	12th grade	Life	$5,000-$7,500	No	$6.90
38	Yes	Receiver	Driver, Construction	Single	None	12th grade	Life	$7,500-$10,000	No	$5.00
28	Yes	Maintenance	Coast Guard, Maintenance	Single	1	12th grade	Life	Over $12,500	No	$8.00
32	No	--	Mail clerk	Married	3	11th grade	Life	$10,000-$12,500	No	Refused

Employed Men (continued)

Age	Em-ployed	Occupation	Past Jobs	Marital Status	Depen-dents	Education	Years D.C. Resident	Family Income	Public Assistance	Hourly Wage
27	Yes	Clerk	Cook	Single	None	12th grade	Life	$7,500-$10,000	No	$7.00
29	No	--	Electronics technician	Single	None	12th grade	21	Refused	No	Refused
33	Yes	Consultant	Laborer, Cook	Divorced	3	12th grade	Life	$7,500-$10,000	No	$8-$10
32	Yes	Maintenance	Maintenance	Married	2	10th grade	28	Over $12,500	No	$8.00
23	No	--	--	Single	--	9th grade	22	Over $12,500	Yes	Refused
22	Yes	Carrier	Insulation, Electrician	Single	None	10th grade	Life	Refused	No	Refused
19	Yes	Laborer	Computer	Single	None	12th grade	17	$5,000-$7,500	No	$6.75
31	Yes	Construction	Construction	Single	--	7th grade	Life	Refused	No	$5.25

APPENDIX 3: OUTLINE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

I. Past, present and future life (20 minutes)

A. Tell a little about yourself, where you're from. Briefly describe a typical day in your life. What are the high points? The low points?
   1. What do you usually do during the day?
   2. What about the evenings? What do you do for fun? How much TV do you watch? What's your favorite TV show?

B. Do you live in a house or an apartment? How many bedrooms does it have?
   1. Whom do you live with -- only your family, or friends also? How many people live in your home?
   2. How many people in the household have jobs and help out with money?

C. We've all made decisions in our life to get where we are. When you look back, what were the good decisions in your life? What were the bad ones, the ones you'd do differently now?

D. If you could gaze into a crystal ball and see yourself ten years from now, what do you think you would see? How will your life be the same? How will it be different?

E. When you plan and hope for the future, what do you hope? Realistically, what would make you feel like you'd made it, that you'd done well with the circumstances you were dealt?

F. What about the kids? Where will they be in twenty years? Where would you like them to be in twenty years?

II. Welfare (10 Minutes)

A. What's the first picture that comes to mind when you hear the word "welfare"? Have you or has anyone in your family ever been on welfare?

B. If you were making a TV show called "Life on Welfare," what would you film? What would be the important parts of the story to show, so that people not on welfare can understand people who are?

C. People who haven't been on welfare have a lot of opinions about it. Let's talk about a few of these, and tell me whether you think they're myths or reality:

1. It's easy to get welfare.
2. Once you're on welfare, you can't get off.
3. Most people on welfare aren't really poor; they drive Cadillacs.
4. It's dumb to get a job when you can get welfare.
5. It's hard to get a job that pays more than welfare.
6. Working is always better than welfare.
7. People who are working should feel proud; people on welfare should be ashamed.
8. Welfare kids will grow up to be welfare parents.

III. <u>Working (30 minutes)</u>

A. Considering the able-bodied people you know, do most of them work or not work? Why? What makes those with jobs work?

B. For people who don't work and aren't getting welfare, where do they get money?

C. Over the last five years, about what percent of the time have you been employed?
   1. What was the best job you've ever had? Why?
   2. When you've left jobs, what was usually the reason?

D. What would you consider a decent working wage?
   1. Working involves expenses for transportation, clothes, food, child care, and so on. If I were to offer you a job, what's the minimum amount you could accept?

E. What's the job market like in D.C.? Is it hard or easy to find a job?
   1. If your 18-year-old cousin from the country came to you for advice about how to get a job in D.C., what would you say?
   2. What kinds of jobs are you qualified to do? What one skill would you like to have that would help you get jobs?

F. What are the major obstacles for you when you think about looking for or getting a job? How important are the following problems for you?
   1. Children or other dependent care
   2. Low wages, no jobs available, discrimination
   3. Lack of education, job skills
   4. Don't know how to look for a job
   5. Transportation
   6. Personal circumstances -- substance abuse, disability, age

7. Other -- medical benefits, etc.

IV. Jobs programs (30 minutes)

A. Have you ever participated in a jobs program? What kind of program was it? Did it train you how to do a job or simply try to help you find a job?

1. Who ran the program? (Government agency, private group, church, etc.) How long did the program last?
2. Was the program open to anyone? How did you get into it? What were the requirements for participation?
3. How did they handle job placement? Did you get a job? Why or why not? If you got a job, how long did you keep it?

B. How well did they handle the obstacles we've just discussed? How did they help you? How did they fail to understand you or your needs?

C. On the whole, do you think jobs programs do any good? Do they work? Why do you think these programs don't work? Is it the people who work in them, or is it that the programs don't really get at the problems that are keeping you from working? Or are the programs fine, but something you're doing keeps them from working? Or are there no jobs, even after you've gone through training?

V. Conclusion (30 minutes)

A. Do you watch "The Cosby Show"? Would you call that the American Dream? Is that a life that appeals to you?

1. Thinking about everything we've discussed, do you think it's possible that you ever could live like that? What would you say the odds are that you could achieve it if you tried really hard -- 10-to-1? 100-to-1? 1000-to-1? Why are they so low?
2. If somebody walks up to you on the street and says to you, "The reason you don't have a life like that is that you just don't work hard enough," what do you say?
3. Are there any special circumstances that make it harder for blacks to work their way out of poverty than whites? Will any of these change in the future?

B. What if you had to help ten people in this neighborhood get jobs, without any assistance from the government. How would you do it? Who

else could you get help from?

1. What about the neighborhood? Is there anything local churches could do? Their friends? Their family? What would you tell the ten people to do for themselves?
2. What about businesses? If you were to go to businesses and tell them how to help these ten people get and keep jobs, what would you say? If you could pull together your former bosses into one room and give them advice on helping people work, what would you tell them?

C. Finally, what can be done to help kids in this neighborhood so they don't grow up to be poor? Pretend for a moment that you're a fairy godmother, and you can do three things to help a child here except take them out of the neighborhood or give them money. What would you do? If you could only give that child advice, what would you say?

D. There are many factors probably contributing to keeping some people poor, especially minorities. If you could wave a magic wand and make just one of the following changes come true, which would you choose as most likely to help poor minorities earn their way out of poverty?

1. Elect more politicians who are minority members to make laws and social programs more helpful to minorities.
2. Put more minorities in hiring positions.
3. Help more minorities own businesses.
4. Educate minorities better.
5. Develop more and better jobs programs.
6. Pay better wages for low-skill jobs.
7. Make more jobs available.
8. Get rid of drugs.
9. Make better, low-cost dependent care available.
10. Improve the motivation of minorities to work hard.

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